

# FEARLESS



75

**Fearless 75**

**Editor: Kevin m. Hibshman**

**Contributors:**

**LINNET PHOENIX**

**JASON BALDINGER**

**COLIN JAMES**

**BARBARA MOORE**

**JOHN PATRICK ROBBINS**

**TODD CIRILLO**

**MICHAEL GROVER**

**JOHN SWEET**

**SCOTT SIMMONS**

**GIOVANNI MANGIANTE**

**KEVIN M. HIBSHMAN**



## **What Are The Moments That Define Us?**

The moment you have to bite someone to avoid suffocating.  
The moment you realise nobody can ever justify  
a provocation to threaten someone else's life.  
The times he tells you he is sorry but he changed  
his mind about trying for a baby, twice.  
The moment you sit on the floor crying because your mind  
floated through the ceiling leaving you behind.

No, our history does not define us.  
It merely helped erode the contours of our inner landscape.

How hard we love when faced with certain despair.  
What we are prepared to give up, to do the right thing.  
If we can sit astride the financial rope swing  
and close our eyes and let go, we still win.  
When we can be brave and say what we mean,  
even if it hurts like amputation of a favourite limb.  
When we place kindness on a post-it note stuck to the sun visor,  
to reminds us what not to choose.  
The moment when we realise love is a butterfly that touches  
down many times in a summer's day.

These things are our territory, which show others the way to map us.

### **Salutation**

...and I cast all this to the sky gods...

let powder blue weigh me  
let thunder judge my worth  
let the rain tax my essence  
let lightning strike me down...  
If found unworthy  
to stand naked, arms raised  
in my salutation of your storm...

### **Fracture**

When you hear the ice splitting  
they tell you to lie flat.  
Distribute your weight over  
the surface, spread out.

Don't panic  
Don't thrash your limbs  
Don't stop breathing  
Don't move

Help with come eventually  
or spring will melt the ice.

*poetry by linnett phoenix*



ray

ray worked the diaper factory  
salt and pepper hair  
salt and pepper beard  
he did mechanic work  
managed his own line

ray was charming  
all the old ladies loved ray  
all the women my age  
weren't creeped out  
when ray gave them a hug  
pecked them on the cheek  
and called them sweetie

it's after christmas  
ray hasn't been to work in days  
employees whisper in every corner  
gossip, how much ray drinks  
at least a case a day

we're called to a meeting  
we hear ray passed away

afterward in the lunchroom  
whispers get louder, gossip  
a holiday with no one  
to celebrate  
an empty case

ray took his belt  
tied it the basement rafters  
kicked out his chair

suddenly  
all ray's loneliness  
slipped away

- jason baldinger

## I Should Have Just Gotten You a Card

In the weeks  
leading up to her birthday  
I paid close attention,  
stealthily inquired,  
wrote down ideas  
of what she may want.  
Eventually, I made surprise plans,  
fun Amazon orders  
and set up a big, bright bouquet  
to be delivered the day of.  
The night before  
her birthday  
she called  
told me  
she found someone new  
and that is what she wanted.

The one thing,  
I hadn't thought of.

- todd cirillo

## True Love

Eventually,  
I missed  
even  
the lies  
she told  
me.

- todd cirillo



**Don't Worry I Hate You Too**

My problems are a lot like gunshot wounds.  
Because statistically they are mostly self-inflicted.

Or started by a bunch of greedy assholes.

Damn, my sheltered life is a real bitch isn't it?

*art & poem by scott simmons*

## **Murder One**

I never set out to write pretty lines.  
And when it comes to readings.  
I go out there to kill, never kiss ass and make friends.

I don't write poetry, I pen chaos with a slice of devilish ecstasy mixed with blood and pain.

I'm loud and reckless because most modern shit sucks.  
And someone has to be willing to speak their mind in spite of who it offends.

I never idolized poets but I certainly admired a rockstar.  
Because that bygone era held magic, where this one simply takes up space in its pretentious  
mundane existence.

Cotton candy holds no substance, as a life not lived full throttle is but a waste of air.

And we are all dying; it's just a matter of when and where.

Drugs are great, sex is far better but a vice all the same.  
Silence is beautiful as a night's drive and the full moon over the dark waters is music to my soul.

Friends are a bad idea and an often misused investment of our time.

And this prick staring at me in the mirror has been loyal for the most part.

I won't waste a second on long winded speeches over shit I will never receive.  
So sulk in your corner and enjoy blowing smoke up one another's ass.

See you in the rearview my nonexistent friends.

*- john patrick robbins*

## **Thank You For Seeing Me**

My new found friend told me.

"Don't think Jack, it's not good for you."

And as much as that statement cracked me up it struck a nerve far deeper than he could ever know.

For it was Jules, who always understood when I was getting out there just a bit too far.

My friend saw through the bullshit far too many others got caught up in when most thought of my name.

He didn't view me as some sort of lunatic asshole, who chased death with the setting sun.

And that struck me on a level most reading these lines cannot comprehend.

I have met many people and fooled far more than I truly care to recall.

The best always got through no matter how hard I tried to bullshit them.

I remained silent through most of our conversation.

How can you tell a true friend from the very start?

They are not blinded by their own concerns to not view a train wreck for what it truly is.

He reminded me of someone who I did not want to recall and could never forget.

He was a diamond but not in the rough.

For his soul shined through the most self destructive fog.

To impress an insecure narcissist such as myself.

It felt good to finally exist again.

Thank you my friend.

*- john patrick robbins*



### **I Wonder What The Poor Folks Are Reading Today**

They say old honest Abe, never told a lie.  
But he wore a hat you could take multiple shits in.

As he looked like a meth addict with rabies and had a bat shit crazy wife.

His face is on a penny which is usually brown from time.  
And I just spent five seconds rattling off about some old fuck.  
I could truly give a damn about.

To entertain someone reading this I will in reality never meet.

Wow, being sober for a week really makes me question.  
How some of you fucking people can stay dry for years.

Of course boring people often live vicariously through others.  
I will now return you to our normally scheduled drunkard later in the day.

But now let's back to the after school special Flipper In The Sahara.

Or as I like to call it, fish fry.

I know where I'm going.  
Care to hold my hand???

### **Low Battery**

When every ounce of energy has been exhausted.  
Look back on what you have done and understand.

It is easy to go with the flow.  
But anything original must destroy everything within its path including it's host.

You will never live to find acceptance.  
But beneath the dark waters maybe you will truly understand peace.

There is nothing left for me to prove.

*poetry by john patrick robbins*



I, psychedelic voyager

the mountain valley diner  
van Morrison is *blowing your mind*  
this reality is a little more *tb sheets*

virgil and wayne royo  
across fifties decor  
amazed I mapped  
my teeth, their roots  
their nerves on a napkin

amazed as I stop time  
while the waitress  
waits to trade an acapella  
thunder road for a chocolate shake

I've spent too much time  
in battle or bar crawl  
a brain full of brewer's yeast  
while body suited regulars  
shake their booties  
hypnotic  
in that moment the stool blushed

it's hot in this tent  
the next wounded soldier  
gets whiskey, a bit for his teeth  
before the saw goes to work  
slow symphony of screams

I never cared for bobby lee's cigars  
they smoke like a hurricane  
taste like treason

trail riders mount fresh horses  
they remember the day  
john brown took on harper's ferry  
somehow I still see dangerfield newby  
die everyday on the internet

by the time I get to martinsburg  
the parrots will run off with a gunner  
by the time I get to gettysburg

## Quick Studies

We learn from pain. One size fits all.  
Fastball connects without warning.

Pain is like that. We suck it up.  
We learn without tutorials.

- *barbara moorc*

virgil will need to drive  
all those big rig lights  
and solar flares damn my eyes

*I see the way you jumped at me  
lord from behind the door*

it takes lifetimes  
to disavow the existence  
of god, unless you live a war  
or a season at the edge  
of america

all groundhogs go to heaven  
july is coming, early is late  
now burn the bookstall

I know a bar, just outside  
the new year, where armies of tvs  
are dark, let's slip into our dotage  
give in to the interstate  
let's disappear

- *jason baldinger*

## Losing Faith or WTF

I used to believe  
You saw everything --  
that you peeled away  
the layers of things  
like onions  
like birthday cakes  
like love.

- *barbara moorc*

for the little conemaugh  
this charmless winter  
shy across asphalt miles  
fresh snow melts morning

paul newman scratches  
the neck of the dog  
that tried to save you

it worked once

I pick factory bones  
try to see  
try to really see  
you, I can't get  
past the trauma

the dead eyes  
of pretty blondes  
waterfalls lurch across  
the town square  
wait out the last bus  
wait out the city mission

there's a red lit sign  
*jesus saves*  
there's a pink sombrero  
alone at lunch counter

vintage owls  
watch over  
little conemaugh  
I stand with them  
on the mountain above  
the trees break  
another world vista  
a hole in the earth

I see a burial party  
come to cover you in mud  
while that rain brown river  
never dredged safe  
rages in a concrete bed

this history is suspect  
spit out debris  
of capitalists  
titans of industry  
they whisper  
*it's only mud*

*it's only mud*

- jason baldinger

SPOTTED, SEVERAL SOCIALLY ECUMENICAL-LESS LAND MASSES

An island for part of the day  
until the tide remembers.  
Gradual kudos like nudes in the sand,  
European sensibilities more  
subtractive than inhibitive.  
Cork soled tennis shoes  
will simply float away.  
A felicitous walk to the market.  
Out of wine, we should  
have bought a case.  
Not at these prices  
too sweet and terminological.

- colin james

Early Rising

Racing dawn, I am cleansed  
again by grit of darkness.  
Its hypnotic systematic flow  
exfoliates rough passage  
between night and day.  
Light stumbles in blindly  
with a touch of defiance.

- barbara moore

Science of Love

Love is a science --  
chemistry equations  
glimpsed in dreams  
and hallucinations.  
My eyes fully fill  
with minuscule numbers  
and capital letters  
on the fertile terrain  
of your open face.

- barbara moore

Gored

My devotion to you  
must have angered the gods.  
Waving my red cape  
in their faces  
was not my brightest move.

- barbara moore

Erase My Life!



art by Scott Simmons



Finding d.a. levy's Grave

We came to this place  
Where half of your ashes rest  
Middle of nowhere, suburban Cleveland  
On a pilgrimage,  
As if Poetry were sacred & holy  
& we came to pray  
As if Poetry were religion  
& you were a martyr  
As if it were a different reason  
& we were not in Cleveland  
For a second opinion on my cancer

We'd been told the grave would be hard to find  
So I went into the office  
Where the lady gave me a map  
That was impossible to read  
Highlighting your space  
& pointed me in the right direction

We walked around for at least twenty minutes  
An endless field of plaques on the ground  
Dan looked up a picture online  
Said it was by the road  
& I found you there  
Humble plaque in a field of plaques  
Childish mountain scene on it  
Darryl Allen Levy  
Not famous Poet  
Not publisher  
Not instigator  
It simply read *Son*  
& I guess you were someones son  
I am someones son  
All of these people in this field  
Were someones sons or daughters  
We could have been standing at the wrong grave  
We could have been standing at any grave  
Ground caving in around the plaque

Tonight solitude, isolation  
That I know I brought on myself  
But dogs are fiercely loyal  
Much more loyal than people  
But that's the isolation of the Poet  
It repeats tragically through his-story  
It is a solitary process  
Crickets hum, facing a dark Autumn sky

- michael grover

this kingdom a  
kingdom of hollow prayer just like  
any other, and shoot the man who  
tells you you're wrong

set the child on fire

strength feeds on fear,  
expands,  
leaves no room for mercy

feels good, though, right?

your cock up  
god's honeyed ass

the shared weakness of lovers

nothing left in the age of gold  
for any us really  
but to kill or be killed

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- john sweet

other shades of nil

unborn child takes a bullet  
between the eyes but  
i'm still working on the punchline

i'm still trying to explain the  
humor in the  
news of the drowning boy

i'm still in love with every  
wasted day you and i  
ever spent together

it's a life, yes,  
but it's no way to live

---

- john sweet

Impermanence  
(Eulogy For Amiri Baraka And The Collingwood Arts Center)

-1-

Lately I've been thinkin' too much  
About impermanence  
How there is no comfort  
Brutal Winter howling outside  
Place I call home  
Crumbling around me  
I don't know what to think  
I'm paralyzed  
I know change is coming like a truck  
& I miss Brian because he would always tell me  
This place is always gonna be here no matter what happens  
He always told us this building has been through a lot  
And it would always be here  
But I know Brian's ghost  
Still haunts these halls

Now I get on the internet to find out you're gone  
You, my personal hero is dead  
& I've been thinkin' about impermanence  
I am still shell shocked  
I am paralyzed  
I just want to get fucked up  
Beyond recognition  
& celebrate the death of this World  
I just want to numb myself  
From the cold hard snow  
Of the polar vortex

-2-

My mentor in LA  
Always told me I would never know you  
Until I saw you read  
Until I saw you read in Philly  
I called him to tell him he was right

It was a religious experience  
You grabbing your balls  
The whole time you read  
Lauren asking me  
Why you were grabbing your balls  
Like I knew Mr. Mojo magic man  
You shaking my hand after the reading  
All I could muster to say was *It's an honor*  
I was shankin' hands with God  
-michael grover

palace of ashes

age of sorrow, age of  
fear or age of failure

stand too close and  
they all look the same

let your house  
fall down around you

touch god  
with dirty hands

by february, i am  
sick of making sense

silence of 2 a.m. is  
broken by dripping water,  
by the muttering of  
clocks in dark rooms and  
strange cars idling on  
frozen streets

no one is your  
friend at this hour

the baby is torn in two  
by its parents

they just keep  
screaming their love at  
each other until the  
body bleeds itself  
dry

---

-john sweet

It was a religious experience

-3-

I just want to watch Bullworth tonight  
Just to hear you say *You got to be a spirit,*  
*You can't be no ghost!*

-4-

Lately I've been thinkin' too much  
About impermanence  
How it could be right around the corner

-5-

Hey Roi,  
Last night I painted *Amiri Baraka Lives!* on the wall  
Like you were Ted Jones not LeRoi  
There is writing on the wall from last night  
As I was tellin' stories about  
You & Lamont Steptoe  
There is writing on the wall

-6-

I've been thinkin' about impermanence  
Neon liquor stores  
Cheap malt liquor high  
Cheap street weed paranoia  
Escape from what  
Just a temporary escape  
Over and over  
I've been thinkin' about impermanence

- michael grover

## My First Drug Dealer

The kid had an egghead and a scrawny body.  
Obviously, a natural fit at our high school.

He sold me cheap vodka for 20 dollars.  
A water bottle full of "moonshine" for 40 dollars.

And about 15 dollars "worth" of weed.

He would only laugh or smiled for half a second.  
And you just always knew you couldn't trust him.

He bailed ass as soon as we got busted for acid.  
And got sent to Hi Point after one semester.

I never saw him again but here's my advice:  
Don't get burned by a weirdo with a short dick.

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- scott simmons

## A Tale of Two Pussies

When I first got her I realized.  
"Shit, I have to take care of her."

Now she's beginning to think:  
*Oh shit, HE's taking care of me.*

*He smells like ass and cigarettes.*  
*But at least he leaves me stuff.*

While she thumps around all night.  
And quietly watches me take a piss.

But I wouldn't trade her for the world.

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- scott simmons



## A Writer's Exit

Cullen Park

-1-

Crow takes off from branch  
Carrion; signifying the death of something

-2-

It was you that first brought me here  
Where river meets lake  
Sittin' on a log  
Toes in the sand  
Staring out at endless Lake Eerie  
Where water meets horizon  
There was so much joy  
You took found objects home  
& made art out of them  
Showing me the beauty in everything  
I think that was the last time I was happy

Now I sit alone  
I have happy memories  
I smile  
I feel peace, zen, nothing  
All I really wanted all along

-3-

Yellow finch lands on branch (previously published in *Kisses From A Straight Razor* (Epic Rites Press))  
Fills the air with song  
Then gone in a flash

-4-

Mallard duck lands on water  
Floats on the glassy lake  
With two other ducks

-5-

Egret flies by  
Flying down the shore  
Two other birds fly the other way  
Bad Brains *Leaving Babylon* plays  
I wish I could

-6-

I would have  
checked out,  
disappeared,  
ended it all  
long ago  
but I keep  
revising the note.  
Over and over  
again and again  
I change one word  
or move sentences around,

wondering whether  
to write in present  
or past tense,  
what is the proper  
closing salutation?  
Multiple crumbled-up drafts  
of one note.  
Too vain to leave  
anything  
less than spectacular.  
Always hoping  
to gain  
some  
new fans,  
no matter  
the cost.

*-todd cirillo*

I understand  
I don't think anyone understands this broken tribe  
Like we understand each other  
I'm surrounded, reminded every day  
How broken we all are  
I don't know if people get  
What they did to us when they closed the place  
But image is everything

-7-

Ant next to the journal  
Living in an ant's universe  
Runs down a huge log

-8-

Crow comes back  
Jumps from branch to branch  
Bending with the wind  
Flies off

-9-

Beer can floats on water  
Shiny blue aluminum  
Waves bang it against rocks

-10-

The sound of water  
Lapping at the shore, rocking  
Has always relaxed me

-11-

It's nice to sit  
Next to the tall marsh grass  
Smoking grass  
I will sit here and write poems  
With my feet in the sand  
I will write until my soul is clean  
Then I'll write some more  
Then I will walk away

-12-

Looking at the mills on the river  
Industry at what cost - michael grover

**first suicide attempt: an anniversary song**

wakes up to snow and then a  
nosebleed in the bathroom sink

a dream of bodies stacked like firewood  
in an ash grey basement

a child laughing or  
maybe the roof caving in

maybe the woman next door  
setting her baby on fire  
in the middle of the street

a life lived like some  
raymond carver short story but  
which one?

how many pages until the ending?

this shit is important

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- john sweet



art by Scott Simmons



## childhood fragment #2

never being a fighter but a scrawny kid with birth defect  
drew to me, since kindergarten, all kinds of bullies.  
they pestered me with names, insults,  
stole my food and excluded me from their teams.  
i grew up like this.

my parents went to the school and placed complaints,  
spoke with teachers, parents, and school principal.  
it didn't stop.

the last year of kindergarten, i found out the only way  
is to throw hands at the odds like  
a motherfucker who has nothing to live for.  
one of the bullies approached me,  
and the insults began one more time. i listened.  
i took another shove, grabbed my yellow lunchbox  
and cracked the plastic open on his head from the side  
in a swing that had been building up for years.

he ran towards the teacher, crying.  
i stood in the center of the classroom eyeing the others.  
"what is wrong with you? i'm calling your parents!"  
yelled the teacher while pressing the sobbing bully  
against her fat stomach.

somehow, i was the bad guy.  
i was the bad guy, and it felt good.

- giovanni mangiante

**ugly man**

ugly man, she said,  
ugly man, write me poems  
about your tar-stained crooked teeth  
and twisted fingers  
and muscle atrophy.

ugly man, she said,  
you better not fuck  
as depressingly as you write  
as depressingly as you sing  
as depressingly as you walk.

ugly man, she said,  
why can't you be positive for once?  
can't you see how much fun I'm having?  
ugly man, people like me  
don't need any help.  
we're alright.

ugly man, when god spat on your mud  
he didn't do so with blessings, it seems.  
you know? I think he came in mine,  
spat on yours, and pissed on the rest.

ugly man, smile!  
they taught me in school we were all equal  
in the end.

*- giovanni mangianta*

**i got it all figured out**

my plan is to spend all my savings  
on a plane ticket to New Zealand  
and set up camp under  
a bridge to live my days as a vagabond.  
i'll yell prophecies  
to whoever  
decides to approach my tent,  
and scribble delirious poems on the walls,  
backwards and upside down  
with charcoal,  
and then a nice lady  
born in india—who looks korean  
and lives in New Zealand  
will madly  
fall in love with me,  
and she'll visit me twice a week  
to bring me wine and boiled potatoes,  
and New Zealand and her name  
will be the only things  
i ever write in capital letters  
until they burn down my tent  
and copyright  
all my backwards upside-down poems  
to different names for an anthology  
about god and all the angels  
destroying humanity down to the last  
atom.

*- giovanni mangiante*



## It's Piling Up

The nervous exhaustion from having too little to do and  
too much time to think about it.

Monotony kills and my mind is a glass-bottomed boat tossed upon  
a raging sea.

It's been a deadening two years worth of anticipation.

I miss the simple life I somehow managed to cut a deal with.

People forget about the ostracized and the isolated, burdened as they are with  
their own concerns.

There never is enough hope to go around though we often need to  
fool ourselves into believing otherwise.

I smoke and smoke and stare out the third floor window at the pathetic semblance  
of a life trying to survive itself.

Meanwhile, stress builds up like two weeks worth of garbage I forgot to take out and mounds of cat shit  
in a neglected litter box.

Kevin M. Hibshman

## Coyote Howl

You graduated early from the school of hard knocks complete with  
several concussions.

You sharpened your wits on the sniggers and sneers of less intelligent beings.

You possess the hands of a mad genius, making everything you touch shine  
brighter, cut deeper and move faster but ultimately too beautiful to last.

Your heavy Viking heart beats too strong, loves too hard and howls like  
a lone coyote on the hill, pining for the waxing moon.

It will be the death of you.

Kevin M. Hibshman

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# **BOOK REVIEW:**

**THE EDITORS MANIFESTO BY SCOTT SIMMONS**

**WHISKEY CITY PRESS, 2021.**

Anyone who has ever attempted to perform the often challenging job of editing will no doubt relate to this caustic but humorous book. It is a totally honest account of the funny lives we writers try to lead. This is Scott's first book and he takes an imaginative, sometimes unpredictable approach that keeps you turning the pages. Just when you are thoroughly drenched in his sardonic wit, he startles you with an intensely human personal revelation. He likes to shift gears but he keeps the engine throttling. This kid has unlimited potential. I'm happy that he included some of his notorious artwork as well. You can read a few samples of his work in this issue. I highly recommend this book to anyone who could use a laugh, a cry, a joke, a fine read.

Kevin M. Hibshman 5/21

## **WE LEAVE YOU WITH SOME FINE QUOTES:**

"I discovered that if one looks a little closer at this beautiful world, there are always red ants underneath," David Lynch.

"The artist's task is to save the soul of mankind; and anything less is a dithering while Rome burns. If artists cannot find the way, then the way cannot be found." Terence McKenna.

"I have a potent degree of love that is so unwise in one world that it is wisdom in another." Sun Ra.

"They say pot smoking affects your memory, man. Yeah, but at least it doesn't affect your memory, man." Cheech and Chong.